

POLYSYSTEM THEORY

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For Roman Jakobson and
in memory of Jurij Tynjanov
sine quibus non.

INTRODUCTION

Since I first launched the polysystem hypothesis in 1970 (Even-Zohar 1970: rep. 1978, 11-13), work on developing it, discussions on its applicability and various tests, both pilot-studies and more comprehensive investigations, have been carried out by a growing number of interested scholars¹ as well as by myself (1972a, 1973, 1978a-1978f, 1979, 1979a). This is encouraging not only because the PS hypothesis thus becomes increasingly part of the public domain and is consequently rescued from the danger of becoming a private whim, but more basically, it gives hope that the whole process of advancing from mere theoretical premises to a more developed theory and research practice will be hastened. My own work has naturally advanced in stages and has, deliberately, not offered a synthetic view; neither have the findings and claims made by me in various articles always been explicitly defined as supporting the PS hypothesis. However, the advantages gained by thus leaving the field relatively open for introducing new ideas and for avoiding hasty dogmatic petrification have been followed by some disadvantage as well. Clearly, the gradual development of one's ideas cannot necessarily be of interest to others, nor can others easily follow them. Therefore, as I observe my own work as well as that of others, I feel that several points now seem neither

¹ See Toury (1974; 1976; 1978), Lambert (1978; 1978a), Shavit (1975; 1978; 1978a; 1979; 1979a), Shavit & Shavit (1974; 1976), Yahalom (1978; 1978a; 1979; 1979a), Lefevre (1978). Cf. also Nemer's report (1977). Of no less relevance are the various works of Prof. Shmeruk, who, though reluctant to make explicit use of the PS theory, has in fact constructed his description and analysis of Yiddish literature (1978) on the idea of a symbiotic polysystem. I also find the Bunyan project conducted by Dr. B. Scholz in Amsterdam (1976), where the PS conception is employed, valuable for a better description of intersystemic transfer processes via peripheries. Also, Prof. Shaked's recent work on the periphery of modern Hebrew canonized literature, where secondary models clearly prevail, is highly illuminating (Shaked, in press).

fully explicated nor fully understood. On the other hand, in order for the PS hypothesis to cope more adequately than previous models with the complex phenomena it hopes to explain, its major notions require continued reformulation and reevaluation, and new formulations must be suggested. The following will attempt to clarify major points, comment upon some misunderstandings, provide some background information and briefly refer to work done so far.

1. SYSTEM AND POLYSYSTEM IN MODERN FUNCTIONALISM: STATICS VS. DYNAMICS

The idea that semiotic phenomena, i.e., sign-governed human patterns of communication (e.g., culture, language, literature, society) should be regarded as systems rather than conglomerates of disparate elements, has become one of the leading ideas of our time in most sciences of man. Thus, the positivistic collection of data, taken *bona fide* on empiricist grounds and analysed on the basis of their material substance, has been replaced by a *functional* approach based on the analysis of *relations*. Viewed as systems, it became possible to describe and explain how the various semiotic aggregates operate. Subsequently the way was opened to achieve what has been regarded throughout the development of modern science as the latter's supreme goal: the detection of those rules governing the diversity and complexity of phenomena rather than their registration and classification. Since the pre-functional approaches hardly ever attempted to detect such rules, what were taken as "phenomena" (i.e., the objects for observation/study), did not actually overlap what it became possible to detect once functional hypotheses were launched. Thus, the idea of system has made it possible not only to account adequately for "known," phenomena, but also enabled the discovery of altogether "unknown" ones. In addition, known data which had never been thought of as correlatable with the data observed now became meaningful for the latter. It is unnecessary to describe in detail how this changed both structures and methods, both questions and answers, of every discipline into which it was introduced.

Nevertheless, despite common premises, the functional approach has not quite been unified. Roughly speaking, two *different and greatly incompatible* programs have been circulated. Unfortunately, this fact has not always been understood, and that has caused much damage to the development of the various semiotic disciplines. Furthermore, the failure to distinguish between these programs not only gave the wrong idea about their respective contents, but made it difficult to appreciate fundamentally what each was designed to accomplish. It is lamentable that while this is recognised as a trivial commonplace in some parts of

the modern semiotic tradition, incorrect presentations, even by "professionals," are still the order of the day.

To cut things short, I will refer to the respective programs as the "theory of static system" vs. "the theory of dynamic system." The theory of static system has wrongly been identified as the exclusive "functional" or "structural" approach, and usually referred to the teachings of Saussure. In his own writings and in subsequent works in his tradition, the system is conceived of as a static ("synchronic") net of relations, in which the value of each item is a function of the specific relation into which it enters. While the function of elements, as well as the rules governing them, are thus detected, there is hardly any way to account for changes and variations. The factor of time-succession ("diachrony") has been eliminated from the "system" and declared as something which cannot be accounted for by functional hypotheses. It has thus been declared to be extra-systemic, and, since it was exclusively identified with the historical aspect of systems, the latter has been virtually banished from the realm of linguistics.

The advantages of introducing the concept of system to replace the mechanistic collection of data are evident. Also, the reduction of the system to an a-historical, extra-temporal aspect, as it were, is not per se wrong. The linguistic scene of the time, with its heavy concentration on historical change, conceived of as non-systemic, clearly constituted an obstacle for discovering not how language differs in different periods, but how it operates. By means of reduction, an adequate level of abstraction had been achieved, and the principal mechanisms of language function thus were laid bare. Obviously, from the point of view of such an abstract model, the possible concurrent existence of different options within one system at a given moment need not necessarily be considered if these are, in principle, reducible. As is well known from other fields of inquiry (e.g., thermodynamics), it is more efficient from the methodological point of view, to start by developing a theory for closed systems.

Thus appreciated, the static approach really accomplishes its ultimate design. If taken, however, for what it is not (i.e., for a model which aims at a closer account of the conditions under which a system operates in time), it can disturb scientific inquiry. There is a clear difference between an attempt to account for some major principles which govern a system outside the realm of time, and one which intends to account both for how a system operates "in principle" and "in time." Once the historical aspect is admitted into the functional approach, several implications must be drawn. First, it must be admitted that both synchrony and diachrony are historical, but the exclusive identification of the latter with history is untenable. As a result, synchrony *cannot* and *should* not be equated with statics, as at

any given moment, more than one diachronic set is operating on the synchronic axis. Therefore, on the one hand a system consists of both synchrony and diachrony; on the other, each of those separately is obviously a system. Secondly, as the idea of structuredness and systematicity need no longer be identified with homogeneity, a semiotic system is necessarily a heterogeneous, open structure. It is, therefore, very rarely a uni-system but is, necessarily, a polysystem — a multiple system, a system of various systems which intersect with each other and partly overlap, using concurrently different options, yet functioning as one structured whole, whose members are interdependent.

If the static, synchronistic approach (rather than “synchronic,” which has been claimed above to be non-static) emanates from the Geneva school, the dynamic approach has its roots in the works of the Russian Formalists and the Czech Structuralists. Its positions have been most explicitly and vehemently formulated by Jurij Tynjanov in the field of poetics (1927) and by Roman Jakobson in the field of linguistics (1929, 1931, 1949), as well as by them together (1929). Their notion of a dynamic system, undergoing constant change, the process of which is in itself a system has regrettably been ignored to a large extent in both fields.² The synchronistic approach — which as it was understood was fallacious — triumphed. For both layman and “professional,” “structuralism” is more often than not equated with statics and synchrony, homogeneous structure and an a-historical approach.

2. PS: PROCESSES AND PROCEDURES

2.1. General Properties of the PS

Against a background such as has been described, the term polysystem is more than just a terminological convention. Its purpose is to make explicit the conception of the system as dynamic and heterogeneous in opposition to the synchronistic approach. But it cannot be stressed enough that there is no property relatable to the “polysystem” which

² It is indeed incomprehensible why “Formalism” has been accused of ignoring literary history and reducing literary studies to text analysis. Erlich’s excellent chapter on “Literary Dynamics” (1965: 251-271) is highly informative in this respect. “The Slavic Formalists had,” says Erlich, “too much historical sense. G. O. Vinokur [...] claimed that the *Opojaz* literary historians were obsessed with the sheer process of motion, with divergences between different literary schools, to the extent of having virtually given up critical standards applicable to more than one period” (Erlich, 1965: 253). Similarly, it is distorted to describe the Tynjanov-Jakobson theses (1928) as a transition document between the “primitive” stage of Formalism and the “developed” one of Czech structuralism. All the ideas expressed in that article célèbre, as well as later ideas of Mukarovsky or Vodicka on literary history, have been formulated — often more clearly and unambiguously — in the works of Tynjanov, Shklovskij, Ejkhensbaum, Zhirmunskij and others, who started working in the field before 1920.

could not, as such, be related to the "system." If by "system" one is prepared to understand both the idea of a closed net-of-relations, in which the members receive their values through their respective oppositions, and the idea of an open structure consisting of several such concurrent nets-of-relations, then the term "system" is appropriate. The trouble is, such practices do not tend to hold. New terms must therefore be coined to make the concepts behind them conspicuous, even when old terms would in principle suffice.

The emphasis achieved by the term *polysystem* is on the multiplicity of intersections, and hence on the greater complexity of structuredness involved. Also, it strongly stresses that in order for a system to function, uniformity need not be postulated. Once the historical property of a system is recognised (a great merit from the point of view of constructing models closer to "the real world"), the transformation of such a historical object into a series of a-historical uncorrelated occurrences is prevented.

Admittedly, since handling an *open* system is more difficult than handling a *closed* one, the exhaustion levels may be more limited. Perhaps more room will be given for "entropy," which may be quantitatively higher due to the fact that more relations must be taken into account, and more than one center must be postulated for the system. These are "disadvantages," to be sure, from the point of view of the theory of static systems. But from the dynamic point of view, they are nothing of the sort. Indeed, synchronism can deal with the general idea of language function, but cannot account for the function of language on specific territory in time, as languages are polysystems, not systems. The heterogeneous structure of culture in society can, of course, be reduced to the culture of the ruling classes only, but this would not be fruitful beyond the attempt to construct homogeneous models to account for the principal mechanisms governing a cultural system when time factor and adjacent systems' pressures are eliminated. The acuteness of the heterogeneous state of semiosis is perhaps more conspicuous, "palpable" as it were, in such cases as when a certain society is bilingual, the common state of most European communities up to modern, and very recent, times. Within the realm of literature, for instance, this is manifested in a situation where a community possesses two literary options, two "literatures," as it were. For students of literature, to overcome such cases by confining themselves to only one of these, ignoring the other, is naturally more "convenient" (or rather, more "comfortable") than dealing with them both. Actually, this is common practice in literary studies; how inadequate the results are cannot be exaggerated.³

³ Conceptual analysis of the case of the Hebrew-Yiddish symbiotic polysystem (cf. Even-Zohar 1970, 1970a, 1973, 1978c, 1979b). In these papers, the function of Yiddish as

The PS hypothesis, however, is designed precisely to deal with such cases, as well as with the less conspicuous ones. Thus, not only does it make possible the integration into semiotic research of objects (properties, phenomena) previously unnoticed or bluntly rejected, but, also such an integration becomes a precondition, a *sine qua non*, for an adequate understanding of any semiotic field. Thus, standard language cannot be accounted for without the non-standard varieties; literature for children is not considered a phenomenon *sui generis*, but is related to literature for adults; translated literature is not disconnected from "original" literature; mass literary production (thrillers, sentimental novels, etc.) is not simply dismissed as "non-literature" in order to evade discovering its mutual dependence with "individual" literature.

Further, it may seem trivial yet warrants special emphasis that the polysystem hypothesis involves a rejection of value judgments as criteria for an *a priori* selection of the objects of study. This must be particularly stressed for literary studies, where confusion between criticism and research still exists. If one accepts the PS hypothesis, then one must also accept that literary historical poetics — the historical study of literary polysystems — cannot confine itself to the so-called "masterpieces," even if some would consider them the only *raison d'être* of literary studies in the first place. (This is an attitude we need not accept.) This kind of elitism should be banished from literary historiography. It should be remembered, however, that this has no bearing upon our standards as critics or private readers. It means, rather, that as scholars committed to the discovery of the mechanisms of literary history, we cannot use arbitrary and temporary value judgments as criteria in selecting the objects of study in a historical context. The prevalent value judgments of any period are themselves an integral part of the objects to be observed. No field of study can select its objects according to norms of taste without losing its status as an intersubjective discipline. Naturally one may take an interest in one particular area of a broad field but even then it is clear that no particular part of any system can be analysed in isolation. On the other hand, I would like to warn against what can be termed a "reverse high-brow" approach. There is a tendency among what we might call "high-brows with a bad conscience" to ignore cultural hierarchies altogether and play up, instead, popular, commercial or naive literature as "the true and exclusive culture," the kind that really matters for a historian. This kind of approach, popular enough in certain circles, is

a non-canonized system in relation to the Hebrew is suggested. Shmeruk's comprehensive work (1978) amply sustains the case. No doubt, the same holds true of any bilingual/diglotic community, although this idea is more often than not ignored or rejected as untenable. Slavonic vs. Russian, Classical vs. Half-literary/vernacular Arabic, Latin vs. Spanish/Italian/French/English are virtually equivalent cases.

no more useful than traditional elitism or any other form of romantic enthusiasm for products of "the true spirit of the nation," uncorrupted, as it were, by sophisticated civilization. A non-elitist and non-evaluative historiography will attempt to eliminate *all* sorts of biases. The PS hypothesis, therefore, should not be allowed to become a pseudo-rational justification for "democratic" ideas (often expressed by the denigration of "high-brow" culture) propagated by literary agents. Such trends, legitimate as they may be within the context of the "literary struggle," have nothing to do with a discipline whose task is to observe it.

2.2. *Dynamic Stratification and Systemic Products*

Heterogeneity is reconcilable with functionality if we assume that the systems of concurrent options are not equal. There are hierarchies within the polysystem — center-and-periphery relations, or dynamic stratification. It is the permanent struggle between the various strata, Tynjanov has taught us, which constitutes the synchronic state of the system. It is the victory of one stratum over another which makes the change on the diachronic axis. In this centrifugal vs. centripetal motion, phenomena are driven from the center to the periphery while, conversely, phenomena may push their way into the center and occupy it. However, with a polysystem one must not think in terms of one center and one periphery, as several such positions are hypothesized. A move may take place, for instance, by which a certain item (property, model) is transferred from the periphery of one system to the periphery of an adjacent system within the same polysystem, and then moves on to the center of the latter. These moves, or transfer processes, which result in such transpositions will be called *conversions*.

Traditionally, we have often been faced with the results of such conversions either without realizing that they have occurred or ignoring the source of their results. Since in practice, the (uni-)system has been identified with the central stratum exclusively (standard language, official culture, high literature, patterns of behavior of dominating classes), peripheries have been conceived of, if at all, as categorically extra-systemic (which, of course, coincides with contemporary ideology, i.e., with the "inside view" of the "people-in-the-culture"; cf. Lotman et al., [1975]; Voegelin [1960]). This attitude has led to a number of developments. First, there was no awareness of the tensions between strata within a system, and therefore a failure to detect the value (meaning, function) of a variety of items; these stood in clear opposition to other concurrent items, the existence and nature of which were ignored. Secondly, as already stated, the process of change could not be accounted for, and changes had to be explained in terms of the individual inventions of imaginative minds or "influences" from another polysystemic center (another

language/another literature). Thirdly, the materially manifested changes, (as different from the process of change, i.e., conversion) could not be interpreted, as their nature was concealed from the observer's eye. Not to mention, for example, the distorted ideas about writer's creativity which was reduced to vague notions of "imagination" or "inspiration," and thus totally inaccessible to any true understanding. One missed the chance of disentangling the knotty complex which constitutes the conditions under which a writer works, part of which consists of certain pertinent constraints, while another is a function of the writer's ability (in cases where this is really prevalent) to create new conditions not imposed on him but by him.

Why conversions take place in the first place, what are the reasons for specific conversions and by what means they are actualized (performed) are questions with which the polysystem theory has been occupied more and more in direct proportion to the increasing instances where its premises were put on trial during the last years.

One thing has become clear: the relations which obtain within the polysystem do not account only for PS processes, but also for PS procedures. That is to say, the PS constraints turn out to be relevant for the procedures of selection, manipulation, amplification, deletion, etc. taking place in actual products (verbal as well as non-verbal) pertaining to the PS. Therefore, those interested not in the processes taking place in their specific field, such as language or literature, but in the "actual" constitution of products (e.g., linguistic utterances, literary texts), cannot avoid taking into account the state of the particular PS with whose products they happen to deal. Naturally, when only official products (standard language utterances, literary "masterpieces") were treated, the work of the PS constraints could not be detected. Faced with innumerable shifts within such texts, the inter-textual status of which is clearly manifested (such as translation and adaptation) scholars often – and deplorably so – took refuge in explaining things with the notions of "mistakes" and "misunderstandings," "bad imitations" and "deteriorated culture." As they failed to see the connection between the position of texts/models (properties, features) within the structured whole (to which they belong), on the one hand, and the decisions made while producing them, on the other, this became their only possible refuge.⁴

2.2.1. *Canonized vs. non-canonized strata*

A major achievement of the Russian Formalists has been, in addition to the general law of stratification, the formulation of the particular hypothesis on the respective status of the various strata. Shklovskij

⁴ For discussion of the polysystemic positions as constraints on products cf. Even-Zohar (1978b, for translated literature), Shavit (1978a and 1979, for children's literature).

(1921, 1923) was perhaps the first to notice that in literature the inequality between the various strata is a matter of socio-cultural differences. Certain properties thus become *canonized*, while others remain *non-canonized* (or, as Bakhtin put it in later years, some are *official* while other are *non-official*). Canonicity as suggested by Shklovskij had nothing to do with value judgment of the texts located on the various strata, and is no euphemism for “good” vs. “bad” literature. Obviously, the “people-in-the-culture” make this identification in order to accept the one and reject the other, but this does not make it valid as an analytic notion. Moreover, the fact that certain properties tend, in certain periods, to cluster around certain statuses does not mean that these properties are “essentially” pertinent to some status. Shklovskij, whose initial point of departure with the idea of “making strange” (1916; later — “de-automatization”) has been a-historical, corrected this fallacy by arguing that it is the automatization of the canonized, its exhaustion, which makes it possible for the non-canonized to replace them. The mechanism of literary change was thus explained by the process of what I called *conversion*, caused, according to Shklovskij, by the increasing inability of the canonized properties occupying the center of literature, to fulfill certain functional needs.

The tensions between canonized and non-canonized culture (official/non-official, high/low, standard/non-standard) are universal. They are present in every human semiotic system, because a non-stratified human society simply does not exist, not even in Utopia. “There is no un-stratified language, even if the dominant ideology governing the norms of the system does not allow for an *explicit* consideration of other than the [...] canonized strata. The same holds true for the structure of society and everything involved in that complex phenomenon. Moreover, all anti-stratification ideologies and experiments on the social level have turned out to be unsuccessful. What might have changed are the *means* by which stratificational oppositions are inherently maintained” (Even-Zohar [1977] 1978: 43).

This state of affairs, which has justifiedly been interpreted as one of the miseries of mankind, need not be thus considered in all its manifestations. The ideology of an official culture as the only tenable one in a given society has resulted in the massive cultural compulsion for whole nations through a centralized educational system and has made it impossible even for students of culture to observe and appreciate the role of the dynamic tensions which operate within the culture for its efficient maintenance. Similarly to a natural system, which needs, for instance, heat regulation, so do cultural systems need a regulating balance in order not to collapse or disappear. This regulating balance is manifested in the stratificational oppositions. The canonized systems of any polysystem would very likely stagnate after a

certain time if not rivaled by a non-canonized system, which threatens to replace it. Under the latter's pressures, the canonized system cannot remain untouched. This guarantees the evolution of the system, which is the only way by which it can be preserved. On the other hand, when no pressures are allowed release, we often witness either the gradual abandonment of a system and movement to another system (e.g., Latin is replaced by the various Romanic vernaculars), or its total collapse by means of revolution (overthrow of a regime, the total disappearance of hitherto preserved models, etc.). Thus it is bothersome to hear lamentations over the decline of culture and the sweeping victory, as it were, of "sub-culture." As I said before, when there is no "sub-culture," or when it is not allowed to exert real pressures on "high"/official/canonized culture, there is little chance of there being a vital "high" culture. Without the stimulation of a strong "sub-culture" or "popular art" the need for real competition will not be created. Under such circumstances, any canonized semiotic activity tends gradually to become petrified. The first steps towards petrification evidence themselves in a high degree of boundness (collocativity) and growing stereotypization of the various repertoires. Literature, to take one instance, becomes highly "bookish," language is reduced to a narrow section of its available inventory. Examples such as Latin, late Slavonic or Hebrew literature (and language) until the Israeli period, Chinese, Arabic literature (and language) until very recently (and still so on the linguistic level) illustrate the case. For the system, petrification is an operational disturbance: in the long run the system can not cope with the changing needs of the society in which it functions.

As a rule, the center of the whole polysystem is identical with the most prestigious canonized system. This does not mean, however, that there is no periphery of the canonized system, or that the generating models for the whole PS necessarily belong to the latter. It only means that it is the group which governs the PS which ultimately determines the canonicity of a certain repertory (of features, items, models). Once canonicity has been determined the said group either adheres to the properties canonized by it (which subsequently gives them control of the PS) or, if necessary, alters the repertory of canonized properties in order to maintain control. On the other hand, if unsuccessful either in the first or in the second procedure, both the group and its canonized repertory are pushed aside by some other group, which makes its way to the center by canonizing a different repertory. If another group adheres to the canonized repertory, it can only seldom gain control of the center of the polysystem; as a rule, one finds them on the periphery of the canonized, later referred to by the "people-in-the-culture" as "epigones." Yet, as polysystems may stagnate, "epigones" may perpetuate an established repertory for a long time, thus eventually

becoming identical — from the stratificational point of view — with the original group which initiated that state of affairs.

Canonicity, however, is not a simple notion, i.e., it does not express one clear-cut relation but, rather, a bundle of relations, which have not yet been satisfactorily clarified. Moreover, it expresses, by a contiguity of ideas, not only the status already acquired by a particular literary unit (text, model), but also its potential status. That is, it can be applied to literary units either about to gain status or about to lose status. The former, because of newly created options, possess the potential of moving from the periphery into the center of the canonized system. The latter, on the other hand, tend to decline in the center although their status may still be perpetuated. The latter, technically known in the literature as “epigonic,” may easily be pushed into non-canonized strata once such units give up certain features. As the situation on the margin is constantly fluctuating, only minute historical comparative analysis will be able to cope with an attempt at description. A-historical classification attempted on such a corpus must fail. It should be emphasized that canonicity is analogous not to the hierarchical oppositions of language functions, but to the hierarchical relations governing the linguistic polysystem. The oppositions that determine what variety of language will be considered “standard,” “civilized,” “vulgar,” “slang” or “high-brow,” are not primarily linguistic, but socio-cultural. The selection of a certain aggregate of features for the assumption of a certain status is extraneous in this case to that aggregate itself. Obviously, once it has been selected, it may also contribute to its own continued select position. But even then it would only be perpetuating a principle which was generated not by itself, but by some other system. Canonized literature, supported in all circumstances by either conservatory or novatory *elites*, is constrained by those cultural patterns which govern the behavior of the latter. If sophistication, eccentricity or the opposite features are required by the elite to gratify its taste and control the center of the cultural semiotic system, then canonicity will adhere to these features as closely as it can. Of course, many components of this mechanism have in fact been transformed into functions operating within co-systems “closer” to the literary PS. Facts of “literary life,” i.e., literary establishments such as criticism (not scholarship), publishing houses, periodicals and other mediating factors, are often “translation” functors of the “more remote” constraining socio-cultural system. Thus we are enabled to carry out descriptive work, at least up to a certain extent, “in the field of literature itself.” and supply poetics with well-defined terms of reference. We can observe what features agglomerate around which models, and assume that the PS “regulates itself” (cf. Lotman, 1976); that is, we simply register what status has been dictated by what functors of “literary life,” especially by those explicitly formulated, e.g.,

polemical articles, encyclopedias, traditional literary histories, school syllabi, etc. (cf. Shavit, 1978). Intra-systemic analysis is therefore perfectly manageable; moreover, it is indispensable if we wish to avoid falling back on prefunctionalist practices or a-historical, positivist sociology. But if we reject the idea that the intra-systemic stratification relations within a PS are ultimately constrained by the larger socio-cultural system, we will be left with a set of questions poorly asked and poorly answered.

2.2.2. Primary vs. Secondary Types

As stated above (§ 2.2.), conversions, as processes, are also necessarily linked to specific procedures imposed on the properties involved. Conversion, in other words, is correlated with *transformation*. These procedures, of various kinds, are sometimes definable as the preconditions for conversions while, at other times, they are clearly results of the latter. Whether they are the one or the other depends on the specific state governing the polysystem and on our ability to discover some general rules for the correlation between conversion and transformation. Initially it is not very clear that two separate principles are involved, as these procedures are intimately linked with the process discussed, and since, during certain periods in the history of language or literature, certain procedures tend to operate almost permanently with certain strata. They seem, rather, to be in some way interchangeable. I am afraid this was the way things were described in various works of mine, but were most explicitly corrected in my latest theoretical contribution to the subject (Even-Zohar, 1978: 28-35). As the principle governing the procedures involved in conversions (and stratification in the PS in general) I suggested (1973; 1978: 14-20) the opposition between "primary" and "secondary" types. But as in the actual literary corpora I had then analyzed, "primary" types tended to appear exclusively in the canonized system (and "secondary" in the non-canonized), I began using the term "primary system" for a "canonized system possessing primary types" (and "secondary system" for a "non-canonized system possessing secondary types"). I must now strongly disavow this practice as it blurs the issue and is incorrect when periods other than those I discussed are taken into consideration (cf. Yahalom, 1978).

The primary/secondary opposition refers to the principle governing the features of semiotic types from the point of view of their admissibility into established repertoires. When a repertoire (of grammatical items, or of literary models) is established and all derivative models pertaining to it (e.g., the grammatical aspects of phrases, literary texts) are constructed in full accordance with what it makes available, we are faced with a conservative system. Every individual product (utterance, text) of the system will be highly

predictable, and any deviation will be considered outrageous. Products of the conservative system I label "secondary." On the other hand, the augmentation and restructuration of a repertory by the introduction of new elements, as a result of which each product is less predictable, are expressions of an innovatory system. The models it offers are of the "primary" type: the pre-condition for their functioning is the discontinuity of established models. Of course, this is a purely historical notion. It does not take long for any "primary" model, once it is admitted into the center of the canonized system, to become "secondary," if perpetuated long enough. The struggle between the primary and secondary options is not a lesser determinant of system evolution than the struggle between high and low strata within the system. Naturally, change occurs only when a primary model takes over the center of a polysystem: its perpetuation denotes stabilization and a new conservatism. Usually, perpetuation is governed by its own specific rules. Thus, it has not been possible so far to observe the perpetuation of any primary model without structural modifications that can be termed, in an ad hoc manner, "simplification." This does not mean that primary models are more sophisticated than secondary, but that during the course of their perpetuation, and within the secondary models which ultimately emerge out of them, a process of reduction takes place. For instance, heterogeneous models are ultimately transformed into homogeneous models; the number of incompatible patterns within the same structure is thus reduced; complex relations are gradually replaced by less complex and so on. Naturally, the reverse procedure takes place when a secondary model is manipulated in such a way that it is virtually transformed into a primary one.

As I argued above, canonicity does not necessarily overlap with primariness, although this may have been the case in more recent times, i.e., since the Romantic Age. It is therefore important to discover the sort of relations which obtain between canonized/non-canonized systems and primary/secondary models. The more we observe literature with the help of these notions, the more it becomes apparent that we are facing an overall semiotic mechanism rather than an exclusively literary one. As systems are governed by those who control them, the tools fought for will depend on their relative efficacy in controlling the system. Thus, when control can be achieved only by break ("change"), this becomes the leading popular principle. It will not be supported however, as long as "perpetuation" can satisfy those who might lose more by break. Naturally, once there is a takeover, the new repertory will not admit elements which are likely to endanger its control. The process of "secondarization" of the primary thus turns out to be unavoidable. It is further reinforced by a parallel mechanism of "secondarization," by which a system manages to stabilize itself, or

repress innovation. By such a process, new elements are retranslated, as it were, into the old terms, thus imposing previous functions on new carriers rather than changing the functions. Thus, as in the case of a new regime which carries on the institutions of the old by transferring their functions to new bodies, so a primary literary model, gradually altered, serves the same functions of secondary models of a previous stage. Semiotically speaking, this is a mechanism by which the less immediately understandable, the less decipherable, becomes more so. The less familiar, and hence more frightening, more demanding and loaded with more information, becomes more familiar, less frightening and so on. Empirically, this seems to be what the overwhelming majority of "culture consumers" really prefer, and when one desires to control them, this preference will be fully met.

2.3. Intra- and Interrelations

The principles and properties of the PS discussed in the above paragraphs, valid for the *intra*-relations of the polysystem, seem to hold true for its *inter*-relations as well. These inter-relations take place in conjunction with two kinds of adjacent systems: one with a larger whole belonging to the same community; and another where another whole, or its parts, belongs to other communities, either of the same order (sort) or not. In the first case, such a view is based on the assumption that any semiotic polysystem — e.g., literature, language — is just a component of a larger PS — that of "culture" to which it is, semiotically speaking, both subjugated and iso-morphic (cf. Even-Zohar, 1978: 39-44), and thus correlated with this greater whole and its other components. For instance, the complicated questions of how literature correlates with language, society, economy, politics, ideology, etc., may here, with the PS theory, merit less simplistic and reductionist hypotheses than otherwise. One need no longer assume that social facts, to take one such case, must find an immediate, unidirectional and univocal expression (form) in literature, as primitive sociology or "history of ideas" (*Geistesgeschichte*), Marxism included, would like us to believe. The intricate correlations between these cultural systems, if seen as iso-morphic in nature and functional only within a cultural whole, can be observed on the basis of their mutual give-and-take, which often occurs obliquely, i.e., through transmissional devices, and often via peripheries. I think I have demonstrated this, at least in part, in my observations on the function of translated literature and other strata which function largely at the periphery. Ample material, and detailed analysis of such cases are discussed by Toury (1977), Shavit & Shavit (1974), Shavit (1978a; 1978b; 1979), Yahalom (1978; and forthcoming) and others.

Moreover, if we assume that the literary system, for instance, is iso-morphic with, say, the social system, its hierarchies can only be

conceived of as intersecting with the hierarchies of the latter. The idea of a less stratified literature becoming more stratified, which I suggested as a universal ("All literary systems strive to become polysystemic" cf. Even-Zohar, 1978: 39) can be thus understood because of the homologous relations obtaining between literature and society. The same holds true for such a key notion of the PS hypothesis, that of the canonized/non-canonized dichotomy, discussed above. This dichotomy is formulated in literary terms, because literature is assumed to be a self-regulating system.

But such a conception is tenable only if the literary PS, like any other of a cultural semiotic nature, is simultaneously *autonomous* and *heteronomous* with all other semiotic co-systems. The degree of autonomy and heteronomy will depend on whether the co-systemic items ("facts") function at its center or periphery. Thus, facts of "literary life," e.g., literary ideologies, publishing houses, criticism, literary groups — or any other means for dictating taste (cf. Ejkenbaum [1929], 1971; Shavit, 1978), function in a more immediate way for the stratification of the PS than other social "facts." In other words, literary stratification, (or, for the PS, multi-stratification), does not operate on the level of "texts" alone, nor are texts stratified exclusively according to features inherent in them. Rather, the constraints imposed upon the "literary" PS by its various semiotic co-systems contribute their share to the hierarchical relations governing it.

As for the second case, i.e., the correlations a system maintains with systems controlled by other communities, the same assumptions are perfectly valid. To begin with, just as an aggregate of phenomena operating for a certain community can be conceived of as a system constituting part of a larger polysystem, which, in turn, is just a component within the larger polysystem of "total culture" of the said community, so can the latter be conceived of as a component in a "mega-polysystem," i.e., one which organizes and controls several communities. In history, such "units" are by no means clear-cut or finalized for ever. Rather, the opposite holds true, as the borders separating adjacent systems shift all the time, not only *within* polysystems, but *between* them. The very notions of "within" and "between" cannot be taken statically. Such an approach, as the static a-historical approach in general, has been a major obstacle in the adequate understanding of the various historical facts.

Let us take a most conspicuous case, that of European communities and their literatures, for illustration. Clearly, throughout the Middle Ages the whole of Central and Western Europe constituted one polysystem, where the canonized system was controlled by literature written in Latin, while non-canonized literature consisted of spoken/written texts in the various vernaculars. Through a complicated

process, this PS gradually collapsed, to be replaced, about the middle of the 18th century, by a series of more or less independent uni-lingual polysystems, whose interdependencies with the other polysystems became more and more negligible, at least from the point of view of both current consumers and the dominating ideologies. However, it is apparent, for the PS theory, that in order to be able not only to describe the general principles of interferences, but also to explain their nature and causes with certain exactitude, a stratification hypothesis must be posited for them. For, when the various European nations gradually emerged and created their own literatures, certain center-and-periphery relations unavoidably participated in the process from the very start. Literatures which developed before others, and which belonged to nations which influenced, by prestige or direct domination, other nations, were taken as sources for younger literatures. As a result, there inevitably emerged a discrepancy between the imitated models, which were often of the secondary type, and the original ones, as the latter might have been pushed by that time from the center of their own PS to the periphery. Thus, the target literature actually functioned, from the point of view of the behavior of its repertory, as a periphery of the source literature. It is no wonder, therefore, that when texts are translated from the first to the latter, they normally — in terms of the translation source literature — become secondarized. They often make the impression on the target public of *dejã vu*, of “epigonic” products. However, this objective property of such texts vis-à-vis a genetic source literature has no functional importance for their role (or the role of the models underlying them) in their proper literature. It is only when we are interested in discovering the processes and procedures by which a system evolved or maintained itself that such considerations are indispensable. And, of course, when bilateral translational procedures are investigated. There is no need to go into detail in explaining why ignoring these relations brings about naive descriptions and analyses.

In short, the important point here is that the PS theory offers the opportunity to deal functionally with the mechanisms of intersystemic interference. The particular conditions under which a certain literature may be interfered with by another literature, as a result of which properties are transferred from one PS to another is a major task of interference theory and calls for the development of a general *transfer theory* (cf. Even-Zohar, 1978e, 1979). In a previous work (1975; 1978a) I attempted to formulate several transfer laws, part of which operate on the polysystemic level. Here, the importance of the relative status of one polysystem versus another is apparent. It also leads to the difficult question of whether a general inventory rule can be formulated, i.e., whether one can induce from the cases investigated that unless certain items are possessed by a PS it cannot function. If this is the case, a

literature lacking the necessary items, is "weaker," so to speak, than an adjacent PS, possessing them. It follows that the "weaker" will readily borrow, if nothing interferes, the wanted item. Actually, such a point of view should not cause the grief so often encountered in traditional comparative literature studies where attempts are repeatedly made to show that a certain influence, if admitted at all, was not the result of the borrower's "inferiority." If one accepts the hypothesis that peripheral properties are likely to penetrate the center once the capacity of the center (i.e., of the repertory of center) to fulfill certain functions has been weakened (Shklovskij's rule), then there is no sense in denying that the very same principle operates on the inter-systemic level as well. Similarly, it is the polysystemic structure of the literatures involved which can account for various intricate processes of interference. For instance, contrary to common belief, interference often takes place via peripheries and moves further (to the centers) from the latter. When this process is ignored, there is simply no explanation for the appearance and function of new items in the repertory. Semi-literary texts, translated literature, children's literature, popular literature — all those strata neglected in current literary studies — are indispensable objects of study for an adequate understanding of how and why transfers occur, within systems as well as among them.

2.4. *Stability and Instability; Ambivalence and Classification*

For a PS to be able to operate, it seems that several conditions must be fulfilled. For instance, there is reason to believe that certain structural conditions must be met by verbal semiotic systems, inasmuch as they are conditioned by the larger cultural (social, economical) whole. Here, a law of dynamism, otherwise formulatable as the law of polysystemization, is universally valid. It means that in order to fulfill the needs, a system actually strives to avail itself of a growing inventory of alternative options. When a given PS has succeeded in accumulating sufficient stock, the chances are good that the home inventory will suffice for its maintenance and preexistence, unless conditions drastically change. Otherwise, intersystemic transfers remain as the only or at least the most decisive solution, and are immediately carried out, even when the center of the PS resists for a while. This may give the wrong impression that it lies within the interest of the PS to be permanently instable, which is not the case. *Instability* should not be identified with change, just as *stability* should not be identified with petrification.

The notions should better be taken on the functional level. A system which is incapable of maintaining itself over a period of time and is often on the verge of stagnation or collapse is, from the functional point of view instable; while a system undergoing permanent, steady and well-controlled change, is a stable one. It is only such stable

polysystems which manage to survive, while others simply perish. Therefore, crises or "catastrophes" within a polysystem (i.e., occurrences which call for radical change, either by internal conversion or by external interference), which can be controlled by the system are signs of a vital, rather than a degenerate, system. Therefore, all the processes and procedures of a fluctuating, heterogeneous, shifting nature – so abhorred for being, as it were, undecipherable and enigmatic – have become crucial questions of study for the PS theory.

Similarly, the systemic stratification, manifested on the product level in typological oppositions (primary/secondary), cannot be interpreted either in terms of finalized facts or as tools for classification. In the first instance, in balanced, stable periods the nature and status of products (utterances, texts, models, patterns) may be relatively univocal. But when shifts become more conspicuous, because of various functional pressures, or when the PS is in state of crisis, because of an overlong occupation of the center by petrified repertory, then "overlappings" immediately take place. Under these, contradictory statuses may partly merge which means that it can function simultaneously in more than one system.

Moreover, this kind of ambivalence thus introduced into the system seems to be not only a result of change but also a precondition for it. It is probably one of the major means for systemic conversion. The idea of ambivalence, owed to Jurij Lotman (1976a; 1976c), has been, after some modification, demonstrated to be of particular importance for the PS by Yahalom (1978; 1978a; 1979; 1979a) and Shavit (1979; 1979a; 1979b). These considerations make it absolutely clear, even for the most orderly minds, that the idea of "system" has nothing to do with the ideas of classification and nomenclatures. Unfortunately, classificatory habits are hard to dislodge and they tend to creep in unnoticed. They can be a serious pitfall when trying to apply concepts suggested by the PS theory. This is so because the PS theory is simply not designed to deal with the classification of texts as such. I believe that I have explicitly clarified in the foregoing that since the PS is a dynamic whole, a multi-leveled system, it is analytically productive to consider its "facts" (from the point of view of actualized entities – products/texts) only if their various (cor)relations with each other can be demonstrated. Thus, detecting the status and/or type of a specific product is valuable not for classification of the PS inventory, as it were, at a given time, but when it is necessary to analyze the processes and procedures involved. Moreover, it seems to emerge clearly from the whole presentation of the PS theory, that the object of study cannot be confined to individual finalized texts alone. Since the PS is supposed to be a network of multi-relations, it is imperative that it deal with many texts, often through sampling methods. Hence, it is the idea of the model i.e., a potential combination selected from a given repertory

upon which "proper textual relations" (order, concatenation and positions [matrix], cf. Even-Zohar [1972]) have already been imposed which must replace that of the individual text. The latter would consequently be discussed as a manifestation of a certain model, whether conservative or innovatory (and thus unprecedented). The importance of a text for the PS is consequently determined only by the position it might have occupied in the process of model creation and/or preservation. Instead of dealing with texts exclusively as closed systems, we are directed towards developing concepts of the literary repertory and model. Obviously, the syntagmatic aspects of the literary text, the "proper textual relations" are insufficient, even with the most advanced formulations, to fulfill the demands of the PS hypothesis on levels of both theory and research.

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